

VZCZCXRO8906
PP RUEHQU
DE RUEHPU #1275/01 2532024
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 092024Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8805
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 2048
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1824
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: MGH01: HAITI'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE CAPABILITIES
TESTED BY RECENT HURRICANES

REF: A. PORT AU PRINCE 1252
[1](#)B. PORT AU PRINCE 1250

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: A coordinating committee of government ministers established by the new Prime Minister September 7 is directing the overall Government of Haiti response to the devastation caused by recent hurricanes. However, the Ministry of Interior's Office of Civil Protection (Direction de Protection Civile, French acronym DPC) continues to direct the GOH's day-to-day crisis response, including managing assets and coordinating international assistance at the operational level. Despite these efforts, the scale of this series of closely-spaced hurricane disasters, which have affected nearly the entire country and cut key communication links, has overwhelmed GOH disaster response capabilities. This makes Haiti vitally dependent on assistance from international organizations, foreign governments, and NGOs for material assistance and the logistics to get supplies distributed to those in need. End summary.

PM ANNOUNCES COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS TO DIRECT RESPONSE

[1](#)2. (SBU) Prime Minister Pierre-Louis announced in a televised address the evening of September 7 that her government had established a coordinating committee of six Ministers (Interior, Public Health, Public Works, Agriculture, Social Affairs, and Relations with the Parliament) to direct the GOH's disaster response. The committee held a meeting that same day attended by the Port-au-Prince director of the DPC, according to a USAID contractor. The Minister of Interior chaired the meeting, according to the same source, indicating that the Coordinating Committee will not alter the Interior Ministry and DPC's responsibility for day-to-day management of the GOH disaster response. Although the Coordinating Committee will likely have a decisive role in policy-level decisions, Emboffs working on disaster assistance efforts judge that the Ministry of Interior, through the DPC, will probably continue to direct the GOH's limited crisis response resources and coordinate assistance from international organizations, foreign governments, and private aid organizations.

OFFICE OF CIVIL PROTECTION TO MAINTAIN OPERATIONAL LEAD

[1](#)3. (SBU) The DPC maintains its central role in the GOH's response to the disaster. The DPC remains the country's

primary aggregator of reports from the provinces on the effects of the recent hurricanes; its most recent estimate is that at least 114,000 persons have been displaced by the flooding as of September 7. The DPC has a wide-ranging mandate to alert the public to potential disasters, establish shelters, and establish local committees to facilitate and direct the intervention of the Haitian government in response to natural disasters. Minister of Interior Paul Antoine Bien-Aime said September 8 that the Ministry had already spent 30 million Haitian gourdes (approximately 750,000 USD) on relief efforts in Gonaives.

¶4. (SBU) The catastrophic nature of the damage caused by Fay, Gustav, Hanna, and Ike, however, has impaired the ability of the DPC to act. Impassable roads and washed-out bridges have made many parts of the country inaccessible by land (ref A), severely limiting the already modest capabilities of the DPC. With no significant search-and-rescue assets of its own, the understaffed agency is reliant on international assistance, especially air and transportation assets, to reach the areas hardest hit by the flooding.

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS ASSESSES DAMAGE TO INFRASTRUCTURE

¶5. (SBU) The Ministry of Public Works, Transport, and Communication is also involved in the response to the crisis. The Ministry's engineers and senior officials were planning to meet the afternoon of September 8 to prepare an assessment of damage to the country's infrastructure. The Ministry is also responsible for the Peligre dam in the Center

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department, Haiti's largest hydroelectric facility. When the dam threatened to overflow, authorities conducted a controlled release of water from the artificial lake into the Artibonite river over the weekend of September 6-7. The Minister of Agriculture, Joanas Gue, has warned that further releases would likely be necessary in the coming days. Evacuations in affected areas have already begun.

¶6. (SBU) A bill pending before Haiti's legislature would enhance the role of the DPC in coordinating disaster assistance. Haiti's Chamber of Deputies on September 8 passed a law declaring a state of emergency. One of the bill's articles would mandate that all NGOs coordinate their disaster assistance with the DPC. The bill, which has not yet been approved by the Senate, does not require NGOs to channel their funding through the DPC.

MINISTRIES OF FINANCE, HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT ALSO CONTRIBUTE

¶7. (SBU) The Ministry of Finance called on September 7 for Haitians living overseas to contribute to relief efforts. Jacques Nelson, the Secretary of State for Finance, told Poloff September 8 that the GOH would accept any kind of assistance but that the Ministry of Interior, through its Office of Civil Protection (DPC), was best equipped to receive any actual donations received. Nelson, echoing Finance Minister Daniel Dorsainvil's comments September 7 that the hurricanes would cause a "great shock" to the Haitian economy, said that the four recent tropical storms would present an especially acute economic challenge to Haiti and its government. Minister Dorsainvil said September 8 that a preliminary analysis indicated that the hurricane damage to housing, cropland, livestock and other areas would total "tens of millions" of U.S. dollars, and would reduce economic growth for 2008 to well below 2.5 percent.

¶8. (SBU) Relief agencies are also working with the Ministry of Health to support health centers in Gonaives and in other affected areas. Representatives of the Pan American Health Organization met with Ministry of Health and Ministry of Environment officials on September 5 to discuss potential disease-prevention activities (ref B).

COMMENT: EFFECTIVENESS OF GOH RESPONSE SHARPLY LIMITED

19. (SBU) The recent hurricanes have overwhelmed GOH disaster response capabilities. International organizations, foreign governments, and NGOs have consequently stepped into the breach in the provision of assistance to communities affected by the flooding, and will continue to do so in the near term.

The USG will continue, in close coordination with the GOH and its international partners, to direct aid to where it is needed the most.

SANDERSON